



Ken Myer

KENNETH BAILLIEU MYER AC DSC
1921-1992

Ken Myer's death in a plane crash in Alaska on 30 July 1992 came as a shock not only to his family and friends but to the nation. The sense of sudden loss stemmed not simply from the tragic and unexpected nature of his death but because at 71 years of age he was still vigorously and enthusiastically engaged in a host of activities and causes of importance to many Australians. A business man *par excellence*, philanthropist, patron and lover of the arts, Ken Myer also had a deep respect for and commitment to the intellectual life. A Foundation Honorary Fellow of the Australian Academy of the Humanities, he remained always a generous donor and advanced the cause of the humanities on many fronts.

Kenneth Baillieu Myer, A.C., D.S.C., was born in California, USA on 1 March, 1921. He went to school at Geelong Grammar, served in the Royal Australian Navy and studied at Princeton University before becoming a member of the board of the family retail business in 1946.

His outstanding success in the world of business for the next 46 years was paralleled by his dedicated and effective work for so many public causes. His keen interest in the Arts saw him as Chairman of the Building Committee of the Victorian Arts Centre and subsequently of the Trust responsible for its artistic and business operations, helping to give new life and new direction to the Arts in Victoria. He was also a member of the Interim Council of the Australian National Gallery and of the Australian National Capital Planning Committee.

In particular Ken Myer's contribution to the establishment and development of the National Library of Australia was of tremendous importance for the Humanities. In 1960 he was invited by the then Prime Minister, Sir Robert Menzies, to be a member of the Library's Interim Council. He went on to be chairman of its fully constituted Council from 1974 to 1982. Not only those associated with the National Library but the Library profession in Australia have paid warm tribute to his leadership and vision, acknowledging especially his rare ability to combine respect for libraries as treasure houses of tradition and information with a passionate concern that these resources should be made widely accessible through the implementation of new technologies, in particular computerisation.

Ken Myer's concern for the advancement of knowledge is also reflected in his work for the Australian Universities Commission on which he served from 1963 to 1965 and the diversity of the specialist areas of learning which he worked to promote is evidence of his extraordinary talent for combining enthusiastic and penetrating enquiry with effective action. He helped to set up the Howard Florey Institute, Melbourne, which is dedicated to medical research and was President of its board from 1971 up to his death. He was a member of the Committee of Economic Inquiry (the first Vernon Committee) from 1963 to 1965, a member of the first trade mission to China in 1973 and of the committee formed in 1975 which led to the establishment of the Australian-Japan Foundation.

As a member of the Myer family, Ken was intimately involved in the Sydney-Myer Fund (established 1936) and the Myer Foundation (established 1960) of which he was the President for many years. It was in the spirit of enlightened philanthropy that Ken Myer supported the foundation of the Australian Academy of the Humanities and continued this support throughout his life. His generous personal donations included paying for the glass roundel of the Academy's crest which is now in the Office of the Secretariat. In 1964, under his Presidency, the Myer Foundation expressed its interest in contributing to research in the humanities in Australia and in particular its wish to support projects of a developmental kind likely to have wide influence. The result was the establishment of a Myer Foundation Grants-in-Aid Scheme for overseas travel for Fellows. This was established for five years in the first instance but continued until 1983. Support was also provided for Visiting Scholars to Australia. As Chairman of the ABC Ken Myer also supported the 1988 Annual Conference of the Academy.

It is not surprising that Ken Myer and his wife Yasuko, who shared so closely in his many activities, were also deeply concerned for the preservation and fostering of nature and of ecological resources in Australia and throughout the world.

In so many ways Ken Myer embodied in his life the goals of the Academy. He sought to advance the knowledge and understanding of the Humanities for their own sake and in so doing to demonstrate their essential importance for the realisation of human potential. Ken Myer testified throughout his life to the effectiveness of combining business acumen and philanthropy with a love of learning and the arts. At the same time he remained alert and receptive to the interests and needs of individuals, especially

those with whom he lived and worked and who were privileged to experience his personal warmth and vitality. The Academy is deeply in his debt.

Margaret Manion